

REMARKS

Claims 1-3 are pending in this application. No amendment has been made herein.

Claims 1-3 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Bergman et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,377,708) (Office action paragraph 3).

Reconsideration of the rejection is respectfully requested.

In the final Office action on page 3 and in paragraph no. 6 on page 4, the Examiner elaborates on Figure 1 and column 9, lines 19-26, of the reference, emphasizing that the circumferentially spaced ports are “**oriented to direct** the flow of drying gas across the processed wafer surface.” The Examiner here states that it is clear from this description that this would lead to the outer edges of the wafer in Bergman et al. inherently incurring more drying than the center of the wafer.

Applicants note, however, that the present claims do not recite that the flow of gas is directed across the wafer surface. Applicants respectfully maintain that Bergman’s circumferentially spaced ports do **not** lead to a method supplying gas as recited in the present claims. Applicants note the following points about Bergman’s apparatus and method:

1) Claim 1 recites supplying the inert gas “to the face of each wafer”. This can be seen in Fig. 2 of the present application. In Bergman et al’s. apparatus, however, N₂ is supplied from circumferentially spaced ports (column 9, lines 18-26). As can be seen in Bergman’s Fig. 1, these ports 76 are **not** directed to the face of Bergman’s wafer 20.

2) Claim 1 recites “where the amount of inert gas to be supplied to the face of each wafer is

such that the amount of inert gas supplied at the outer peripheral portion is larger than at the center thereof.” This implies some supply of inert gas to the center of the wafer. In Bergman et al.’s apparatus, however, there is **no** supply of gas at all to the center. In fact, it takes a long time for N₂ gas to reach nearby the center of the wafer in Bergman et al., and Bergman’s method clearly differs from claim 1 in this respect.

Applicants note that, in paragraph no. 7 of the final Office action, the Examiner responds to Applicants’ argument from page 4 of the Amendment of February 10, 2003, regarding the lack of analogues for the injection openings in Bergman et al. The Examiner states that “it is noted that the features upon which the applicant relies ... are not recited in the rejected method claims.” However, Applicants submit that the arguments presented in the Amendment were valid. These arguments regarding the apparatus of Bergman were intended to show that Bergman’s apparatus cannot achieve the method limitations of the present claims, which are achieved in the present method by certain apparatus structure. The comparison of Bergman’s apparatus to the present apparatus was made for purposes of understanding the differences in the present method and Bergman’s method. The structure of Bergman’s apparatus is relevant to Bergman’s method, as discussed above.

Applicants therefore assert that claims 1-3 are not anticipated by Bergman et al. and withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

Claims 1-3 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Cady (U.S. Patent No. 4,544,446) (Office action paragraph 4).

Reconsideration of the rejection is respectfully requested.

In paragraph no. 8 of the final Office action, the Examiner responds to Applicants' argument that Cady's apparatus appears not to meet the limitation of claim 1 that the amount of inert gas being supplied at the outer peripheral portions is larger than at the center. The Examiner refers to column 3, lines 38-49 of Cady regarding a "flow of nitrogen directed at the center of the wafer" being needed to move the droplets in the spin drying method. The Examiner also refers to Cady's Figures 6-8B as "clearly [showing] fluid flow guides such that the flow of fluids, such as nitrogen drying gas, direct the gas supply more towards the outer periphery than to the center."

However, Applicants submit that description in column 3 of Cady does not appear to be disclosing more inert gas supplied at the outer peripheral portion than at the center.

In Cady's apparatus, N₂ gas is supplied mainly at the center of the wafer. In this reference, therefore, the density of N₂ gas is thick at the center of the wafer and becomes thinner toward the outer region. This is in contrast to the present invention "where the amount of inert gas to be supplied to the face of each wafer is such that the amount of inert gas supplied at the outer peripheral portion is larger than at the center thereof."

Applicants therefore assert that claims 1-3 are not anticipated by Cady and withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

Response under 37 CFR 1.116
Yuji ONO et al.

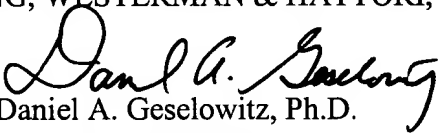
U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/940,788
Attorney Docket No. 011075

If, for any reason, it is felt that this application is not now in condition for allowance, the Examiner is requested to contact Applicants' undersigned agent at the telephone number indicated below to arrange for an interview to expedite the disposition of this case.

In the event that this paper is not timely filed, Applicants respectfully petition for an appropriate extension of time. Please charge any fees for such an extension of time and any other fees which may be due with respect to this paper, to Deposit Account No. 01-2340.

Respectfully submitted,

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